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ABSTRACT

A total of 559 children 5 and 6 years of age were observed in 72 full-time and 43 part-time preschools in Sweden. Activities, language, and group constellations were coded according to the categories used in the Oxford Preschool Study. Findings indicated that although the two types of preschools had the same program, they differed in relative amount of goal-oriented activities and social play. However, the same total amount of time was devoted to educational activities in each of the two forms of preschool. A significant correlation was found between sex and form of preschool when language interaction between children and personnel was considered. Girls in full-time preschools were found to have had more long dialogues with adults, while girls in part-time preschools were more passive and silent. Boys in part-time preschools had relatively more verbal interaction with adults and got more attention from them than did boys in full-time preschools, who were found to have had more peer interaction. Results are interpreted as showing an interaction between sex and educational structure of the preschool. (Author/RH)

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Abstract

TIME STRUCTURE AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN SWEDISH PRESCHOOLS

Paper presented at XVIII World Congress of O.M.E.P.
(World Organisation for Early Childhood Education)
at Jerusalem, Israel, July 13-17, 1986

559 children 5-6 years old were observed in 72 full time and 43 part time preschools in Sweden. Activities, language and group constellations were coded according to the Categories used in the Oxford Preschool Study.

Although the two types of preschools have the same program, differences were found in relative amount of goal-oriented activities and social play.

Totally, however, the same time was devoted to educational activities in the two forms of preschool.

A significant effect was found between sex and form of preschool as to language interaction between the child and the personnel. Girls in full time preschools were found to have more long dialogues with the adults favouring their sexual identity, while girls in part time preschools were more passiv and silent. Boys in part time preschools had relatively more verbal interaction with the adults and got more attention from them than boys in full time preschools who were found to have more peer interaction. The results are interpreted as an interaction between sex and educational structure of the preschool.

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TIME STRUCTURE AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN SWEDISH PRESCHOOLS

It is generally found that males talk more than females in formally structured situations such as conferences, class rooms, formal meetings, etc. These are characterized by a hierarchal structure. Women talk more in informal settings and small groups, which are characterized by more personal and face to face social interaction.

The language used in these situations is also different. Women use a personal, ego-oriented language while men use an abstract and unpersonal language. (Thorne B & Henley N, 1975)

I my study on comparisons between day care centers and part time preschools in Sweden I'm going to show that the same differences are clearly noticeable in these two forms of preschool. This difference is mainly attributed to the organizational structure of the preschool environment. Day care is characterized by a more informal setting where educational activities are spread out during the day. Part time preschool is characterized by being more formally educational, more like the school setting, where time is limited.

Equal opportunity for men and women is a main goal of a democratic country. Men and women, girls and boys should be treated in the same way.

The general social goal of the Swedish preschool is described by the concepts of democracy, solidarity, equality, security and responsibility.

Equality of opportunity in the labor market for men and women was the main driving force of the great expansion of day care service in Sweden from about 1970 and is still a high priority area in most communities.

Although men and women have equal rights there is still a great disproportion between legal rights and educational level, occupational choice, time spent in household activities, responsibility for child care etc.

Much school research in Sweden, England and USA shows that girls and boys are treated differently. Eg. boys talk more and get more attention in the classroom. (Spender 1982)

Studies of preschool children show early sex differences in choice of activities. These are usually explained by identification theory.

Differential treatment and different attitudes to boys and girls are found among parents as well as teachers and people in charge of child care and education.

Organizational factors of the child's environment are not a common explanation of differences in development among boys and girls.

In my study, the organizational structure of the preschool was found to have differential effects on the language behavior and social interaction among boys and girls in preschool.

Day care	1-6 (10) year old children	6-8 hours a day	Group size 12-15	2 preschool teachers 1 nurse
	Fee (200-1200 swedish crown a month)	Parents employed or study	Children with special needs	10-60% of 1-6 year old attend
Part time preschool	Mostly 6 year old or 4-6	3 hours a day	Group size 15-20	1 preschool teacher 1 nurse
	Free of charge	Parents at home or employed	Every child right to attend	85% of 6 year old and some 4-5 years of age

There are two forms of Swedish preschools:

Day care centers where children spend 6-8 hours 5 days a week. There are 12-15 children in the group from 3 to 6 or from 1 to 6, sometimes including school age children. The children are cared for by 3 personal. At least 2 of these are preschool teachers.

The proportion of preschool aged children who attends day care centers in different parts of the country varies from 40-60% in big cities to 10-20% in less populated areas. Children from families in which both parents are employed or studying have priority right to a day care place. Children with special needs have

legal right to a day care place. There is a monthly fee varying according to municipal policy and parental income.

Part time preschools are attended 3 hours a day either morning or afternoon. Most 6 year old but sometimes 4 and 5 year old children attend part time preschool. There are 15-20 children in each group. One preschool teacher and one nurse are in charge. Part time preschool has an educational tradition that goes back to Kindergarten. It is free of charge. About 85% of all 6 year old children attend part time preschool. The remaining 15% are in day care.

Table 1

THE SWEDISH SAMPLE

	Number preschool	Number children	Average age	Percent boys	Staff child ratio
Day Care	72	346	5.8	48.5	1:4-6
Part time	43	213	6.1	43.2	1:7-10

Observations were collected in 72 day care centers and 43 part time groups in 20 communities around Göteborg, Sweden. In each preschool 5 children aged 5 to 6 years were observed twice for 20 minutes at a time. Thus in each preschool 200 minutes of the children's activities were observed altogether. In all 559 children were observed making the total number of observed minutes about 22.000.

For the coding of activities, the categories used in the Oxford Preschool Study were translated and adjusted to the Swedish sample in cooperation with dr Kathy Sylva, Oxford.

95% of Swedish preschools are administered by the municipal authorities who are also responsible for the educational content. The central authourity, The National Board of Social Welfare, delivers recommendations as to pedagogical activities, group size, number of personel, etc. Although the day care center has a social function caring for children whose parents are occupied by work or studies, the educational goal of the two forms of preschools is supposed to be the same.

The frequences of activities, language and group constellations were calculated. Comparisons show that proportionally more time was devoted to educational activities in part time preschools then in day care centers.

Table 2

COMPARISONS OF TIME SPENT IN GOAL-STRUCTURED, LOOSELY-STRUCTURED AND PASSIVE ACTIVITIES

	Miami	Oxfordshire	Sweden Day care		Sweden Part time	
Goal-structured STK SMK B VBM SKR SM RL OL	20%	19%	29%		39%	
Loosely-structured GMR L M SL SSL IL SSUL	39%	49%	37%		29%	
Passive Non-engaged	33%	22%	10%		11%	
Group activity			10%	20%	10%	21%
Other (Group routine Purposeful m)	8%	10%	13%		11%	

On the average more time proportionaly was spent in social play and interaction in day care centers compared to part time preschools. Great variations were found between day care centers, however.

Table 3

TIME SPENT IN SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PERSONNEL

	Day care	Part time	
Child-adult contact	44.3%	38.2%	sign $p<.05$

As the children spent about twice as many hours in day care than in part time preschool, about the same amount of total time was devoted to educational activities in each form of preschool.

A greater proportion of child-adult language interaction was also found in day care centers.

Table 4

TIME SPENT IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF LANGUAGE INTERACTION IN DAY CARE CENTERS AND PART TIME PRESCHOOL GROUPS

	Day care	Part time	p<.05
Child-child monologue	37.4%	35.7%	
Child-adult monologue	15.9%	12.8%	
Child-child dialogue	14.1%	12.2%	
Child-adult dialogue	7.2%	6.1%	
Silence	25.4%	33.2%	x
Child-child language interaction	51.5%	47.9%	x
Child-Adult language interaction	23.1%	18.9%	x

Differences in the proportions of time spent in contact between children and adults and between children thus show that social interaction plays a greater role in day care centers than in part time groups where educationally goal oriented activities predominate.

It was also found that the daily time schedule was more clearly planned and structured in part time preschools than in day care centers.

This can be accorded to the 3 hours time limit which implies a time structure leading to more planned activities, more heavy reliance on educational material and a more organized group structure.

It was found that group size contributes only to a small part of this variance.

Thus the part time preschool setting has characteristics that reminds of school while the day care setting reminds of a home atmosphere where social interplay dominates.

My results show that there is an interaction between sex of the child and kind of setting as to communication behavior.

Girls were found to talk more in day care centers than in part time groups while the opposite was true for boys. The average number of minutes of different forms of language interaction in each observation are shown in the following chart.

Table 5

LANGUAGE INTERACTION OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN SWEDISH PRESCHOOLS
(AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES)

	Day care		Part time		Form	Interaction Form*Sex
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	p<.05	p<.05
Dialogue child-adult	1.28	1.60	1.40	1.08		x
Dialogue child-child	2.83	2.80	2.78	2.25		
Monologue child-child, child-adult	10.53	10.70	9.58	9.73	x	
Silence	5.36	4.90	6.24	6.94	x	x
Sum	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00		

This difference was mainly attributed to amount of conversation between the child and adults. Thus in day care centers, girls had many dialogues with adults. In part time groups, boys had many dialogues with the adults.

Girls in day care centers were thus observed to be in closer contact with adults, of which 95% are females, either chatting in social interaction or while busy with creative work.

In part time groups, girls were more silent compared to girls in day care centers. Girls in part time groups were also observed to be more often passively watching compared to girls in day care centers. They also tended to have less language interaction with other children.

Boys in part time groups were on the whole not so talkative as boys in day care centers but a greater proportion of language interaction was devoted to discussing with adults.

Boys in day care centers spent more time in peer interaction, often in large group organized activities.

A description of the differences between boys and girls in the two kinds of preschool setting is shown below

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GIRLS IN TWO FORMS OF PRESCHOOL

Day Care	Part time group
More dialogue with adults More individual contact with adult	More watching More silence More adult directed parallell activity

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS IN TWO FORMS OF PRESCHOOL

Day Care	Part time group
More play in large groups	More individual contact with adult

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS IN BOTH KINDS OF PRESCHOOL

Girls	Boys
More art work	More constructive play More informal play More social play with rules More large group play without adults

According to interactionist theory (Cahill 1983) girls and boys interact in different ways with factors in the environment. The sex differences found in the two forms of Swedish preschools can be attributed mainly to educational structure in which time was found to be a more important factor than group size and staff:child ratio.

Girls and boys adjust to the organizational structure in different ways.

In the part time group, where a more formal educational structure is dominant, girls adjust in the same way as in school, that is, by being silent and doing what is expected. Boys, on the other hand, use more active strategies making themselves visible by talking and obtaining the attention from the adults.

In day care centers educational activities are loosely structured and spread out in time. There is more time for social talk and interaction. Girls adjust to this condition by

having more contact and conversation with the personnel than the boys.

The social environment that characterizes the day care center, where the personnel is mainly female, can be supposed to create a favorable environment where the girl's identification process is strengthened. A closer analysis shows that girls often identify with the personnel by e.g. wanting to be a preschool teacher when grown-up.

It can be stated that the two kinds of preschools give girls and boys different experiences. In day care centers girls learn to handle social relations and solve social problems, which according to Carol Gilligan, Harvard School of Education, influences their moral development. Girls in part time group learn to adjust to a male hierarchial structure by silence and passivity. (Gilligan 1982)

Can the organization of preschool environments change this pattern?

A more harmonions balance between time allowed for social interaction and goal oriented activities should give both girls and boys a better chance to develop their particular sexrelated qualities. As a consequence, the part time preschool in which children spend 3 hours a day, should be extended to about 4-5 horus a day. Thus more time could be allowed for social interaction and social play.

It is important to be aware of the fact that preschool environment can be the soil in which the same injustice thrives as we are trying to conquer in adult society.

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